

Paley in his Nat. Theology, Chap 23—speaks of minds utterly averse to "the flatness of being content with common reasons"—and considers the highest minds "most liable to this repugnancy."

See the passage, and explain the moral or intellectual defect.

Turgot has said, "He that has never doubted the existence of matter, may be assured he has no aptitude for metaphysical inquiries." It would seem as if doubt and uncertainty grew with the growth of the intellect, and strengthened with its strength. The giant intellect, it is true, is for a season borne along with the tide, the opinions and prejudices of the mass are silently acquiesced in, the senses are, for awhile, the supreme arbiters from whose decisions there is no appeal—mystery is yet afar off, it is but a cloud in the distance, whose shadow, as it flits across the landscape, gives a pleasing variety to the scene. But as the perfect day approaches, its morning light discovers the dark and straggling clouds, which at

first skirted the horizon, assembling as at a signal, and, as they expand and multiply, rolling slowly toward the zenith, till at last the whole heavens, if we except a faint glimmering in the east, are overshadowed. The earth was once firm beneath the feet, but it now affords but a frail support,—its solid surface is as yielding and elastic as air. The grass grew and the water ran, and who so blind as to question their reality. A feeling of loneliness came over the soul, for these things are of the past.

This is the season of probation, but the time approaches, and is now at hand, when the glorious bow shall "rise on the lurid rear of the tempest, the sun laugh joyously abroad, and

Every bathed leaf and blossom fair.

Pour out its soul to the delicious air."

The embryo philosopher seeks the sunny side of the hill, or the grateful coolness of the grove—he instinctively bares his bosom to the zephyr, that he may with the less inconvenience discuss the reality of outward existences. No proposition is so self-evident as to escape

his suspicion, not yet so obscure as to withstand his scrutiny. He acknowledges but two distinct existences, Nature and Spirit; all things else which his obstinate and self-willed senses present to him, are plainly, though unaccountably, absurd. He laughs through his tears at the very mention of a mathematical demonstration. There is a flaw about what is common that at once excites his ridicule or disgust. He goes abroad into the world, and hears men assert and deny in positive terms, and he is astounded—he is shocked—he perceives no meaning in their words or their actions. He recognises no axioms, he smiles at reason and common sense, and sees truth only in the dreams and superstitions of mankind. And yet he but carries out principles which men practically admit every day of their lives. Most, may all, acknowledge a few mysteries; some things, they admit, are hard to understand; but these are comparatively few, and could they but refer them back one link in the chain of causes and effects, the difficulty would at once be removed.

Our philosopher has a reasonable respect for the opinions of men, but this respect has not power to blind his judgment; taking as he does an original view of things, he innocently confounds the manifest with the mysterious.

That such is the common reason, was properly enough, in the first place, no recommendation with him, and is now a positive objection.

What is more common than error? Some seeming truths he has clung to as the strongholds of certainty, till a closer investigation induced mistrust. His confidence in the infallibility of reason is shaken, and his very existence becomes problematical. He has been sadly deceived, and experience has taught him to doubt, & question even the most palpable truths. He feels that he is not secure till he has gone back to their primitive elements, and taken a fresh and unprejudiced view of things. He builds for himself, in fact, a new world.

The opinions of the few, the persecuted, the dreamers of this world, he has a peculiar respect for—he is prepossessed in their favor. Man does not wantonly send the meanest

ties that binds him to his fellow; he could not stand aloof, even in his prejudices, did not the stern demands of truth, backed by conviction, require it. He is ready enough to float with the tide, and when he does stem the current of popular opinion, sincerity, at least, must nerve his arms. He has not only the burden of proof, but that of reproof, to support. We may call him a fanatic-an enthusiast-but these are titles of honor, they signify the devotion and ardent surrendering of himself to his cause. Where there is sincerity there is truth also. So far as my experience goes, man never seriously maintained an objectionable principle, doctrine, or theory. Error never had a sincere defender; his disciples were never enthusiasts.

This is strong language, I confess, but I do not rashly make use of it. We are told that "to err is human," but I would rather call it *inhuman*, if I may use the word in this sense. I speak not of those errors that have to do with facts and occurrences, but rather errors of judgment. Words, too, I could regard as mere signs of ideas.

That passage in the Vicar of Wakefield which Johnson pronounced fine, but which Goldsmith was wise enough to strike out, previous to publication, must be taken in a very limited sense. "When I was a young man," he writes, "I was perpetually starting new propositions; but I soon gave this over; for I found that generally what was new was false".

At best, we can but say of a common reason, that men do not dispute it. True, they defend it when attacked, for if they did not, Reason never would. This is well explained by Gray, when he undertakes to account for the popularity of Shaftesbury. "Men are very prone," says he, "to believe what they do not understand; — they will believe anything at all, provided they are under no obligation to believe it; — they love to take a new road even when that road leads nowhere."

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